UNSC Meeting on Iran-Israel Escalation

June 20, 2025 at the UN Security Council in New York

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) convened an emergency session on international peace and security to address the escalating conflict between Israel and Iran and mounting concerns over peace and security in the wider Middle East. The session coincided with high-level diplomatic efforts in Geneva between the foreign ministers of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Iran, aimed at curbing further regional escalation. Member States cited Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State.

Briefers

Secretary-General Guterres

Appealing for an end to fighting and the return to serious negotiation, Secretary-General Guterres implored all parties to the conflict and other regional States to "give peace a chance."

Addressing the concerns and varying perspectives of States on Iran's nuclear program, Secretary-General Guterres invoked the "trust gap" among the international community on said issue. He made specific reference to the issue of Iran's adherence to the NPT amid its repeated statements that it is not seeking nuclear weapons. The Secretary-General stressed the need for Iran to provide full access to IAEA inspections. Only diplomatic discussions will prove conducive in bridging the stated gap.

IAEA Director General Grossi

IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi delivered a sobering assessment of the nuclear safety situation in Iran following Israeli strikes. He reported that attacks on nuclear sites have caused sharp degradation in nuclear safety conditions, though they have not yet led to radiological releases. However, he warned of the continuing danger that such releases could occur. The IAEA has been monitoring Iranian nuclear sites closely since Israel began its attacks a week ago.

Grossi provided detailed updates on the current situation at Iran's nuclear facilities. At the main fuel enrichment plant, the June 13 attack targeted and destroyed critical electrical infrastructure, including the electrical substation, main power supply, and backup generator. The same day saw attacks on the main cascade hall. The pilot fuel enrichment plant, which contains both above and underground cascade halls, suffered severe damage with the above-ground section functionally destroyed and underground facilities seriously compromised.

While radiation levels outside the facilities have remained unchanged, Grossi reported radiological contamination within the damaged facilities, with possible isotope dispersion. The radiation, particularly alpha particles, poses significant danger if inhaled or ingested, though it can be managed with protective measures. The primary concern within the facilities remains chemical toxicity.

Grossi expressed particular alarm about potential threats to the Bushehr power plant, which contains thousands of kilograms of nuclear material. An attack on Bushehr would result in the release of very high radiation into the nearby environment, potentially affecting areas spanning several hundred kilometers and requiring food restrictions.

The Director-General emphasized that nuclear facilities and material "must not be shrouded by the fog of war" and called for maximum restraint. He noted the vital need for clear information, citing incorrect reports by Israeli media about attacks on Bushehr that were later retracted. Grossi stressed that diplomatic solutions remain within reach, with elements for an agreement already discussed, and that the IAEA can guarantee that nuclear weapons will not be developed in Iran. He concluded that constructive dialogue is needed urgently, warning that the alternative to peace is a looming threat of nuclear proliferation that could effectively erode the NPT as a whole.

Rosemary DiCarlo – Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo (USG) warned that the region now, “teeters on the edge of a full conflict,with risks to civilians growing each day. In Tehran, homes, government buildings, factories, and other infrastructure have been struck, and the June 17th bombing of a state-television channel marked, “a chilling moment”. Massive traffic jams and fuel shortages have forced many residents from their homes, while others remain trapped and unable to flee. The USG acknowledged the displacement of Israelis from their homes.

The human toll has been severe. The Iranian health ministry reported 224 killed and over 2,500 wounded by Israeli strikes, 90 percent of whom were civilians. DiCarlo also made note of local NGOs and human rights groups who estimate the death toll to be more than double the official figure. More than 20 senior military figures, including the Iranian Armed Forces’ Chief of Staff and several nuclear scientists have been killed in the strikes.

DiCarlo noted that the exchange of strikes has constrained airspace not only over Iran and Israel but across Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, and warned of devastating economic fallout if trade through the Strait of Hormuz is disrupted. She welcomed recent talks in Geneva between European and Iranian foreign ministers and urged the international community to seize “every opportunity to de-escalate,” stressing that, “the imperative for diplomacy has seldom been greater”.

Views of Major Players

Iran

During Friday's UNSC session, Iran delivered a forceful condemnation of what it described as a series of deliberate, unprovoked acts of aggression by Israel. Citing the large-scale military assault launched on June 13, the Iranian delegation asserted that civilian infrastructure and population centers, including the capital Tehran, were directly targeted. According to Iranian representatives, the Israeli strikes were not incidental but part of a systematic campaign, intentionally killing senior military officials, scientists, athletes, women, and children — many of whom were reportedly killed in their sleep. Holding up evidence of infants killed in their beds, the Iranian Ambassador described the attacks as "deliberate war crimes" and called for accountability under international humanitarian law.

Iran reported that hundreds of civilians have been killed or injured across the country. On June 16, Israel allegedly struck a hospital in Tehran and a facility operated by the Iranian Red Crescent Society, resulting in the deaths of at least two pregnant women and their unborn children. According to Iran, a total of five hospitals have been damaged in what were described as intentional violations of international norms. Iran dismissed any claims of collateral damage, stating unequivocally that these were "deliberate acts of brutality."

Iran also condemned Israel's attacks on safeguarded nuclear facilities. It reported that on June 18, Israel struck a centrifuge production site, and on June 19, it targeted a heavy water reactor — both under the safeguards of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran asserted these attacks constitute flagrant violations of Security Council *Resolutions 2231* and *487*, as well as a direct assault on the global non-proliferation regime. Quoting *Resolution 487*, the Iranian representative emphasized that any military attack on safeguarded nuclear facilities is considered an attack on the IAEA system and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) itself.

Iran strongly criticized the Security Council's failure to act, warning that silence in the face of such violations sends a dangerous message — that international law is applied selectively. Iran warned that any U.S. military action against Iranian nuclear facilities would constitute a clear violation of the UN Charter and significantly undermine global security. It criticized what it called the "selective invocation" of international law by the Council, labeling it a form of institutional hypocrisy.

Iran insisted that its nuclear program is strictly for peaceful purposes as it remains under the most intensive inspection regime of the IAEA. It underscored that Israel remains the only State in the region with undeclared nuclear weapons and continues to operate outside the NPT framework, further destabilizing the region.

Calling on the Council to fulfill its primary responsibility under the Charter, Iran demanded a formal determination that Israel's use of force constitutes a breach of peace and an act of aggression. It also urged immediate and unequivocal condemnation of the attacks on its sovereignty and safeguarded facilities. Iran rejected what it called Israeli "lies and fabrications" meant to whitewash war crimes, emphasizing that there is no legal, moral, or political justification for the targeting of civilians and critical infrastructure.

Iran closed its remarks by asserting that, in exercising its inherent right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter, it has responded proportionally and in full compliance with international humanitarian law — taking steps to minimize civilian harm. Iran affirmed that it would continue to defend its territory and people as long as Israeli aggression persists and the Council fails to act. It concluded by warning that continued inaction by the Security Council would represent a betrayal of the UN's founding principles and would embolden future violations by signaling that international law can be disregarded with impunity.

Israel

Israel delivered a scathing rebuke of Iran, directly addressing Iran's representative by name. "You are a wolf pretending to be a diplomat—and we are done pretending otherwise." Citing Iran's repeated calls for the destruction of Israel, including a May 2025 statement referring to Israel as a "dangerous cancerous tumor" to be "eradicated," Israel condemned what it described as Tehran's genocidal intent. The Israeli envoy challenged Iran's moral standing at the Council, accusing it of attempting to play the victim while orchestrating terror across the globe. "How dare you ask this Council for sympathy," Israel exclaimed, referencing Iran's recent statements to the UNSC and letters submitted to the body. Israel claimed that Iran's ballistic missile attacks, including a direct strike on a major hospital in southern Israel serving over a million civilians, were deliberate acts of war targeting the most vulnerable.

With Iran allegedly expanding its missile range beyond 4,000 km and continuing its nuclear ambitions underground, Israel declared that it acted out of necessity. "We will not wait for the missiles or the atomic bombs," Israel announced, emphasizing that Israeli strikes were targeted, lawful, and defensive. Referring to statements by allied leaders, Israel attested to Germany's Chancellor Merz statement that it is carrying out the "world's dirty work"—not just defending itself, but serving as a bulwark, a shield, against Iranian aggression. The speech concluded with a stark warning: "This is not just Israel's fight—it's the world's. And if no one else will stand up, we will."

Permanent Five Member Perspectives

In support of finding a diplomatic solution

China

China underlined the mass casualties on both sides of the attacks on Israel and Iran, which can affect regional countries around them. China also denounced Israel's actions stating that they violated the UN charter and International law. As a result, China outlined its government's four-part solution to the conflict, and urged others to support it as well.

The four-part solution addresses the following:

1. Ceasefire as an urgent priority: Calling for an immediate halt to fighting.
2. Ensuring civilian safety as a top priority: Strictly adhering to international law and avoiding harm to innocent civilians.
3. Dialogue and negotiation as the fundamental solutions: Stressing that military means cannot resolve complex issues and advocating for a political-diplomatic approach.
4. Indispensable role of the international community's peacemaking efforts: Urging major powers to exert positive influence and highlighting China's readiness to play a constructive role.

Russia

Russia emphasized that Iranian peaceful civilian nuclear facilities had been targeted, warning this could lead to an "unseen nuclear tragedy." Russia insisted on providing an objective assessment of the situation, stating unequivocally that "it was Israel that attacked Iran," thereby demonstrating not just blatant disregard for international law but also showing contempt for its key ally, the United States, which had been declaring intent to reach a diplomatic solution.

Russia explained that Iran's nuclear program operates under full scope IAEA safeguards and is subjected to rigorous inspection protocols. Russia contended Iran has unequivocally adhered to its obligations under the NPT as opposed to Israel..

Russia drew parallels to the 2003 Iraq war, Russia expressed regret that "the US does not wish to learn from its own mistakes," and criticized the US, UK, France, and Germany for believing that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. Russia reminded the Council that similar IAEA reports were used to justify the US-Israeli attack on Iraq in 2003, suggesting that "Israel is doing the dirty work for them." Russia declared the attacks "completely unacceptable and unlawful under international law" and demanded that Israel immediately end attacks on Iran, especially nuclear facilities under IAEA protection.

Russia concluded by sharing the Secretary General's call for an immediate ceasefire, emphasizing that solutions can only come through diplomacy.

United States

Amid the intensification of hostilities in the Middle East, the United States informed Iran that it is not too late to "do the right thing," echoing President Trump's demand that Iran abandon its nuclear enrichment program. The U.S. reproached Iran's acting as a "constant menace" to the peace and security of its neighbors and the world as it repeatedly calls for Israel's destruction and "death to America." Iran has launched direct attacks on Israeli civilians including Israel's largest hospital.

The U.S. also rebuked the devastating pattern of behavior demonstrated by Iran's proxies, the consequences of which are borne by its regional neighbors and the intentional community at large. Positioning Iran as the principal source of terror in the Middle East, the U.S. urged the Security Council not to forget that the Iranian government is the "ideological force behind Hamas' deadly assault on Israel." That same government encouraged Hezbollah in Lebanon and enabled Houthi rebels in Yemen to disrupt global trade and launch missiles endangering innocents in Israel, the U.S. maintained. A drone attack by an Iran-backed terrorist group in Jordan killed three American service members. "Enough is enough," the U.S. declared.

While the U.S. is not involved in Israel's strikes, it continues to stand by its longtime ally. It reminded the Security Council that Iran could have avoided this conflict had it agreed to a deal with the Trump Administration preventing their acquisition of a nuclear weapon. In sharp contrast to many of its UN partners, the U.S. asserted that Iran "has all that it needs" to construct a nuclear weapon and simply awaits a decision from its Supreme Leader. Imploring Iran's leadership to "choose prosperity for their people," the U.S. finished its remarks by offering a blistering rebuke of Iran. For far too long, Iran has "prioritized terrorism above the wellbeing of their own people. Their resulting weakness is on full display for the entire world."

United Kingdom

Echoing calls made by many of its Western counterparts, the UK reiterated its demand that Iran must never acquire a nuclear weapon. It lamented IAEA reports that Iran had enriched uranium up to 60 percent. In a message to Iran, the UK stressed that any restriction of IAEA access to its nuclear facilities, diversion of nuclear material, or increasing production of highly enriched uranium would only intensify the threat posed by its nuclear program. It urged Iran to cooperate with IAEA to bridge the "trust gap" invoked by the Secretary General.

Signaling its longstanding commitment to diplomatic solutions to Iran's nuclear program, a commitment that remains the "only way to resolve nuclear issue for the long term," the UK

referenced the meeting between European foreign ministers and their Iranian counterpart in Geneva on Friday, a window of opportunity to urge a return to diplomacy. A diplomatic solution is in the interest of all parties and one not out of reach, the UK insisted. Rather, "now is time for restraint, calm, and return to diplomacy and dialogue."

France

France contested that Iran "can't and must not develop a nuclear weapon," otherwise it risk weakening the non-proliferation regime. Additionally, together with its European allies, France remains ready to initiate diplomatic negotiation to ensure Iran will never gain access to nuclear weapons. Towards this end, it highlighted the importance of the E3+ Iran Foreign Ministers meeting in Geneva and called for a robust, verifiable, sustained agreement that offers concrete commitments to be met

Arab States Perspectives

Algeria

For Algeria, "there can be NO double standard" in adhering to international humanitarian law (IHL). Algeria reminded the UNSC of its repeated warnings about Israeli violations of IHL in Gaza and laid bare the figures in support of their earlier calls. Algeria also reminded the UNSCl that *Resolution 487* was never truly implemented as Israel's nuclear facilities were not placed under IAEA safeguards. Nevertheless, all states must uphold the tenets of IHL as a matter of preserving our shared humanity.

Algeria further urged the UNSC to reconsider IAEA Director General Grossi's statement confirming the absence of evidence for a "systematic effort" of Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. Algeria also underscored Grossi's statement that International humanitarian law is clear–nuclear plants must not become the object of attacks. Algeria explained the risks posed by the spread of radioactive material to States well beyond the borders of the targeted State. Consequently, if the facilities were attacked, then these attacks would be a flagrant violation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Kuwait (GCC)

On behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Kuwait denounced Israel's attacks on Iran over the last eight days and committed to intensifying their diplomatic efforts to bring a close to the current escalation. It called on the Security Council and international community to better shoulder their responsibilities in bringing an immediate end to the increasingly devastating conflict. Kuwait also pushed for the continuation of US and Iranian negotiations on the Iranian

nuclear program. It concluded its statement by urging the international community and the UNSC to take swift action and to support diplomatic dialogue to prevent further escalation.

Iraq

Given the occupation of Israeli warplanes in Iraqi airspace, Iraq explained that it was forced to take precautionary measures and close its airspace, leading to economic losses and humanitarian suffering. Iraq reiterated its assertion made on the 13th of June in the Security council, where it called on the end of breaches to Iraq's territorial integrity and stressed that Iraq must not become a "battleground" for settling international scores.

Iraq stressed the multifaceted consequences of Israel aggression. The continuation of war, its geographical expansion, and the involvement of new actors threatens to expand the conflict, Iraq argued. Israel's current violations coincide with ongoing negotiation tracks and threaten to deal a "severe blow to political efforts." The impunity of Israel is not an isolated incident, Iraq asserted. The gravity of the situation is only heightened as the UNSC has convened multiple times regarding Israel's assaults on its regional neighbors. Iraq joined calls for Israel to subject its nuclear facilities to the safeguard regime and sign the NPT.

Conclusion

The emergency session exposed deep fractures in the international community's approach to the Iran–Israel escalation. While delegations diverged along familiar geopolitical lines, they voiced unanimous concern over its humanitarian and nuclear-safety implications. The debate revealed a central tension between calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities and efforts to address underlying nuclear-proliferation concerns. Western states largely focused on Iran's nuclear programme, whereas regional actors decried Israeli breaches of sovereignty and international law.

IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi's detailed technical assessment underscored the unprecedented nature of strikes on safeguarded nuclear facilities and the real risk of radiological contamination,warning that any attack on the Bushehr power plant could disperse radioactive material across hundreds of kilometres.Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo detailed hundreds of civilian casualties on both sides and massive displacement, while constrained airspace and threats to navigation through the Strait of Hormuz illustrated the conflict's wider economic fallout.

Among the permanent members, China proposed a structured four-point peace plan and Russia condemned Israeli operations. The majority of European States urged for diplomatic restraint; while the U.S. reaffirmed its support for Israel.

At the end of the meeting, it was clear that the vast majority of council members support a diplomatic solution to the crisis. However, the window for a diplomatic intervention is slowly closing, which means that the international community must act immediately.